SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ENABLING USERS OF GAMING ACTIVITIES TO AUTOMATE THEIR TAX DEDUCTIBLE AND CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Technical Field:

This invention relates in general to facilitating tax deductible and charitable contributions, and in particular to a method and system for making charitable contributions electronically. Even more particularly, the invention relates to a system and method for enabling users of gaming machines and systems to automatically make and fund charitable contributions.

2. Description of the Related Art:

Charitable and non-profit organizations are typically required to raise money or solicit gifts in order to fund their operations. A donor is usually requested to make a pledge, and then later to honor the pledge. A problem with this type of fund raising is that some of the pledges do not get honored. Some donors forget about their pledge, while others do not have adequate funds available with them to make the desired contribution or gift. Another factor is that the donor's financial situation may suffer between the time of making the pledge and the time of honoring the pledge, such that adequate resources are no longer available to make the contribution.

In addition, the impulse for a donor to make a pledge is maximized at the time a pledge is solicited. In particular, if a donor's financial situation suddenly improves, such as when a donor experiences success at games of chance, the donor may be inclined to be more generous. However, the impulse dissipates over time and as such is less likely to be fulfilled over prolonged durations. As a result, charitable organizations can lose significant revenue that would have been used to continue their efforts because of their inability to access donors during such events. Thus, a need exists to enable would-be donors with the means to immediately and automatically provide contributions to charitable organizations.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

One embodiment of a business method and system for making tax deductible or charitable contributions allows users of gaming systems, such as games of chance, to automatically improve their odds of winning or potential payout amount. The system enables gaming system users to designate a portion of their funds or net proceeds from gaming activities to be donated to recipient or charity of their choice. The donations are automatically made and funded to authorized charities or non-profit organizations and the balance of the net proceeds are distributed to the players. In addition, the system also complies with any Internal Revenue Service reporting that is required by law.

The foregoing and other objects and advantages of the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art, in view of the following detailed description of the preferred embodiment of the present invention, taken in conjunction with the appended claims and the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

So that the manner in which the features, advantages and objects of the invention, as well as others which will become apparent, are attained and can be understood in more detail, more particular description of the invention briefly summarized above may be had by reference to the embodiment thereof which is illustrated in the appended drawings, which drawings form a part of this specification. It is to be noted, however, that the drawings illustrate only a preferred embodiment of the invention and are therefore not to be considered limiting of its scope as the invention may admit to other equally effective embodiments.

Figure 1 depicts a schematic diagram of an illustrative embodiment of an automated interface constructed in accordance with the method and system of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a layer diagram of programs in a data processing system of **Figure 1** that cooperate to automatically connect to a remote data processing system according to the method and system of the present invention.

Figure 3 is a schematic diagram of an optional user interface terminal for the data processing system of **Figure 1**.

Figure 4 is a high level, logical flowchart of an illustrative embodiment of the method and system of the present invention utilized by the automated interface of **Figure 1**.

Figure 5 is a schematic block diagram of the user interface terminal of **Figure 3**.

Figure 6 is a schematic diagram of another version of the present invention.

Figure 7 is a high level flowchart of one adaptation of the present invention.

Figure 8 is a high level flowchart of another adaptation of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The present invention may be executed in a variety of systems including computer systems having various operating systems. The computer system may be a personal computer, a network computer, a midrange computer or a mainframe computer. In addition, the computer may be a stand-alone system or part of a network such as a local-area network (LAN) or a wide-area network (WAN). For the purposes of illustration, one embodiment of the present invention, as described below, is implemented utilizing a personal computer.

Referring now to **Figure 1**, there is depicted a block diagram of a server **112**. Server **112** includes a system bus **210** that is connected to a central processing unit (CPU) **212** and to memory, including read only memory (ROM) **214** and random access memory (RAM) **216**. System bus **210** is coupled to a PCI local bus **218** through a PCI host bridge **220**. PCI local bus **218** is connected to additional nonvolatile data storage devices, such as one or more disk drives **222**, and to an audio adapter **230** and a graphics adapter **232** for controlling audio output through a speaker **234** and visual output through a display device **236**, respectively. A PCI-to-ISA bus bridge, such as expansion bus bridge **238**, connects PCI local bus **218** to an ISA bus **240**, which is attached (through appropriate adapters) to a keypad **242** for receiving operator input. A microphone of other audio input device **246** is connected to audio adapter **230**.

Also included within server **112** are data ports for communicating with external equipment, such as other data processing systems. The data ports include, without limitation, a serial port **250** attached to ISA bus **240** for linking server **112** to remote data processing systems (such as a bridge) via a modem (not illustrated) and a communications adapter **252** attached to PCI bus **218** for linking server **112** to other stations of a LAN (such as clients).

Server **112** also contains software applications that are stored on the data storage devices and loaded into RAM **216** for execution by CPU **212**. Among those applications is a communications program, such as communications manager **260**, that manages the exchange of information between the LAN and remote data processing systems. Included in communications manager **260** is a connection initiator **261** for establishing dial-up connections to remote data processing systems. Communications manager **260** also includes Internet sharing software **262** that enables multiple LAN stations to access the Internet via a single connection. In the illustrative embodiment, server **112** also includes a connection schedule file **264**, which preferably is stored in disk drive **222**, and Internet sharing software **262** includes a request predictor **265** that utilizes connection schedule file **264** to trigger connection initiator **261** in advance of anticipated communication requests.

Connection schedule file **264** is maintained by a schedule editor and/or an automatic schedule modifier,

each of which is preferably also included in Internet sharing software **262**. Server **112** also includes a Web browser **270** and an E-mail client **280** that allow an operator of server **112** or client to retrieve and view information from the Internet and send and receive E-mail via the Internet, respectively.

With reference now to **Figure 2**, there is depicted a layer diagram of the software applications within server **112** that cooperate to provide the functionality of the present invention according to the illustrative embodiment. At the highest level of the layer diagram, are the software application programs **310**, including communications manager **260**, web browser **270**, and E-mail client **280**. At the intermediate level is an application program interface (API) **320**, through which application programs **310** request services from the operating system **330**. Operating system **330**, which occupies the lowest level of the layer diagram, is a network operating system. As such, in addition to managing the operations of server **112** (by performing duties such as resource allocation, task management, and error detection), operating system **330** also provides tools for managing communications within the LAN and between LAN stations and remote data processing systems. Included within operating system **330** is a kernel **332** that manages the memory, files, and peripheral devices of server **112**. The lowest level also includes device drivers, such as a keypad driver **340** that kernel **332** utilizes to manage input from and output to peripheral devices.

For purposes of illustration of the present invention, a gaming system having a play station, such as a slot machine (**Figure 3**), is equipped with a user interface terminal **81**. Terminal **81** includes a display screen **83** for graphically interfacing with the user, a data storage device reader **84**, and option buttons **85** that can be selected by the user when prompted by the system. Terminal **81** is merely symbolic of means that can be used to initiate a charitable contribution according to the present invention.

Figure 5 is a block diagram of one embodiment of the user interface terminal of **Figure 3** having a central processing unit (CPU) **501** with memory, including read only memory (ROM) **503** and random access memory (RAM) **505**. CPU **501** is coupled to a data storage device **507** and a display device **509**. An operator input device **511** utilizes a keypad or the like for receiving operator input. Also included within the terminal is a data port **513** for communicating with external equipment, such as other data processing systems. In the illustrative embodiment, the terminal is a slot machine (manual or electronic) having traditional hardware including, for example, a reel system **515**, a random number generator **517**, a clock **519**, a hopper system **521**, a wager system **523**, and means **525** for accepting wagers.

Referring now to **Figure 4**, there is illustrated one embodiment of a high level, logic flow diagram of a method for generating income for charitable or non-profit organizations according to the present invention. The

method prompts players of gambling or gaming systems such as games of chance in casinos or "internet gambling" with options for making charitable contributions during the gaming activity. In the preferred embodiment, the present invention automatically increases a player's odds of winning a game or the potential payout based upon the size or amount of the charitable contribution designated by the player. The charitable contribution may be funded in many different ways, including but not limited to internal payment systems facilitated by a gaming facility (e.g., "chips"), data storage devices such as credit cards, debit cards, SMART cards, etc. The gaming activity and charitable contributions may take place at traditional, manually-facilitated gaming venues, automated, self-service oriented gaming interface terminals, or any combination thereof. The present invention is also capable of tracking the contributions of players across multiple gaming terminals and venues, even if a player uses different methods of funding the contributions. Alternatively, the present invention is also adapted to track the contributions of players at different gaming houses or entities, or any combination of these scenarios.

In one embodiment of the present invention, a gaming entity such as a gaming house has a game or gaming machine for the use and enjoyment of patrons or players. For example, an electronic slot machine is equipped with a remote terminal **81** (**Figure 3**), and the algorithm begins as illustrated at block **401** (**Figure 4**). In this example, the gaming machine may provide the player with a choice of more than one type of game, as depicted in block **403**.

As illustrated at block **405**, after the player selects a game, the odds of winning the game and/or the potential payout(s) of the game (should the player prevail) may be optionally presented or displayed to the player. The player is given the opportunity to select charitable or non-profit organization to which he or she would like to make a contribution, as depicted at block **407**. This step may be accomplished in many ways. For example, the player may be allowed to enter the name of an organization, given a list of pre-selected organizations from which to choose, or allowed to designate a qualifying organization at a later time. Alternatively, a computer associated with the present system may selectively or randomly generate a charitable organization(s) to which the player may donate.

As illustrated at block **409**, the player can also be prompted to select the size or specific amount of the charitable contribution, and whether the contribution is contingent upon the player winning the game. For example, the player may choose to donate 10% of the net proceeds or winnings of his or her gaming activities, but not to make a donation if there are no net proceeds. Alternatively, players may make donations from their personal funds, and make such donations either dependent upon or independent of the outcome of the gaming activity. In another embodiment, the net proceeds of the gaming establishment (i.e., the "house") reduced by a designated percentage with the balance donated to the charity. These or other options also may be selected on a game-by-game basis, for an extended period of gaming activity (e.g., for all games played during a selected

weekend), or any permutation thereof. Alternatively, a player can choose to make a charitable contribution regardless of the net outcome of the game or period of gaming activity.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the system automatically adjusts the odds of winning the game and/or the potential payout(s) in proportion to the level of contribution designated by the player, as depicted at block **411**. Alternatively, the odds or payout may be adjusted at the request of an organization. For example, if the player indicates that one percent of the net proceeds of the gaming activity are to be donated to charity, the odds of winning the game may be increased only slightly, or the potential payout may be increased by a nominal amount. However, if the player indicates that ten percent of the net proceeds of the gaming activity are to be donated to charity, the odds of winning the game or the potential payout may be increased more significantly. Note that the precise or enhanced odds of winning and/or potential payout(s) need not be displayed to the player.

The wagering or funding means selected by the player for playing a game and/or making a charitable contribution at a gaming venue is illustrated at block **413**. This step may require simply placing chips or currency in a designated location, electronic wagering techniques, or other means of wagering, such as inserting, scanning, or reading a data storage device at a terminal. In the future, fingerprints or voiceprints may be used, for example, as the communication or

identity means to identify players. Should the player choose to use a data storage device or card for funding or wagering purposes, the card may be utilized in any one of a number of reading devices, including electronic, magnetic, optical, and/or other means. A determination is made as to whether the card is valid, and/or whether a line of credit or debit is authorized by the issuer of the card. If the card is not validated and/or authorized, the process proceeds, for example, by displaying a message within display screen **83** such as "See attendant," "Authorization denied," or a similar message for conveying to the user or player that an alternate funding means is required.

As depicted at block **415**, the game is then initiated and played. Based upon the selections designated by the player in the previous steps, the distribution of funds takes place subsequent to termination of the game, as illustrated at block **417**. For example, if the player prevailed and had designated a 10% donation of the net proceeds for this single gaming activity, only 10% of the net proceeds would be withheld from the player. Under such circumstances, no donation would be made if the player had not prevailed and the wagered amount would be distributed to the house. In another embodiment of the present invention, the player is given the option of canceling his or her donation after a determination is made as to the outcome of the gaming activity. Finally, as illustrated at block **419**, settlement and confirmation of the donation and any required Internal Revenue Service (IRS) reporting is completed. In the preferred embodiment, the charitable organization is funded

electronically and the player is issued a receipt for accounting or tax purposes. The receipt may be e-mailed or otherwise sent to the player, or issued at the site of the gaming activity. The process then terminates at block **421**.

In an alternate embodiment, each player has a "contribution profile" that defines and/or summarizes the individual's contribution activities, including but not limited to a history of contributions to the player's organizations of choice. As shown in **Figure 6**, contribution profiles may be stored on a host computer **601** or other devices, such that the contribution profiles can be transmitted directly to gaming devices **603**, via e-mail servers **605** to the internet, or wireless servers **607** to devices such as personal data assistants.

Figure 7 depicts such an adaptation of the present invention. This version of the method starts at block **701** and, as depicted at block **703**, a player inserts a data storage card, which is described above. A determination is made at block **705** as to whether the card is valid. If not, the method ends, as illustrated at block **707**. If the card is valid, the method continues and retrieves the player's contribution profile from a host, as depicted at block **709**. As illustrated at block **711**, appropriate information regarding the player's contribution profile is displayed for the player to make selections, such as the recipient of the contribution (block **713**), and the amount of the contribution (block **715**). The player then plays the game (block **717**) and the

winnings are distributed (block **719**) in accordance with the previous options selected by the player. The method terminates then terminates, as depicted at block **707**.

Referring now to **Figure 8**, the present invention is also capable of allowing the player to make anonymous contributions. This version of the method starts at block **801** and, as depicted at block **803**, the player inserts a data storage card. A determination is made at block **805** as to whether the card is valid. If not, the method ends (block **707**), and if the card is valid, the method continues and retrieves the player's contribution profile, as depicted at block **809**. As illustrated at block **811**, the player's contribution profile is displayed and the player makes selections regarding the recipient of the contribution (block **813**), and the amount of the contribution (block **815**). As shown at block **817**, a determination is made regarding the player's desire to make the contribution anonymous. If so, the contribution is made anonymously (block **819**) such that the receiving organization does not know the source of the contribution. If the player wishes to make him or herself known as the contributor, the method simply allows the player to play the game (block **821**) and the winnings are distributed (block **823**) in the manner previously options described. The method terminates then terminates, as depicted at block **807**. Alternatively, anonymous contributions may be made without validating identification by, for example, putting money or other payment means in a machine and keying in a social security number or other identifying number.

The present invention has several advantages. The business method and system motivates and rewards gaming patrons to make many different types of contributions, including donations to charity, non-profit organizations, wildlife preservations, personal retirement accounts, presidential election campaign funds, etc. Preferably, the players and patrons of gaming services are given improved odds of winning and/or larger potential payouts upon winning a game. In addition, donors have the option of making their donations anonymously. Providing gaming patrons with incentives to make donations would offer a significant improvement to the overall welfare of this country and others through the collection of funds in this manner. The present invention also increases the good will of players, gaming establishments, and their employees. In addition, if the names of the charitable organizations are selectively or randomly generated, a more uniform distribution in donations can be realized. In order to maintain equity, certain organizations may not be offered as options in order to more fairly distribute funds.

It is also important to note that, although the present invention has been described in the context of a fully functional computer system, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the mechanisms of the present invention are capable of being distributed as a program product in a variety of forms, and that the present invention applies equally regardless of the particular type of signal-bearing media utilized to actually carry out the distribution. Examples of signal-bearing media include, but are not limited to, recordable-type media

such as floppy disks or CD-ROMs and transmission-type media such as analogue or digital communications links. In addition, it should be apparent that the present invention may be employed with alternate means of human personal identification systems, including but not limited to fingerprint identification systems and voice or voiceprint identification systems. Furthermore, many of the steps of the present invention may be offered and performed in a different order than the one presented above.